

powers—concluded an agreement with Iran that, if it is implemented as it was agreed to, promises a peaceful, diplomatic solution. Thanks to the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, Congress has had ample time to review the agreement.

I have spent hours and hours studying the text of the agreement and scrutinizing our intelligence agencies' classified assessment of their ability to verify Iran's compliance.

As a member of both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee, I attended more than a dozen hearings and briefings with administration officials and outside experts—both for and against the agreement. In the end, I have concluded that this agreement effectively blocks Iran's pathways to develop a nuclear weapon for well over a decade.

Right now, what we heard from testimony from both those people who support and oppose the agreement is that Iran can acquire enough fissile nuclear material to make a bomb in less than 3 months. The agreement extends this breakout time to at least 1 year by slashing Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent and banning enrichment above 3.67 percent, which is far below weapons grade, for 15 years.

The agreement also reduces Iran's number of centrifuges by more than two-thirds for a decade, and it maintains inspectors' access to Iran's uranium mines and mills—so the whole life cycle of uranium—for a quarter of a century. These are just some of the many restrictions the agreement imposes on Iran.

In addition, Iran is bound by the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and other agreements to a permanent commitment not to pursue nuclear weapons and, as part of that agreement, to permit access by inspectors to any suspected sites. Of critical importance, the Iran agreement is not based on trust—none of us trust Iran—but it is based on an inspections regime that is more rigorous and more intrusive than any previous negotiated agreement. Nuclear experts are confident that we will be able to detect violations by Iran. Thanks to language in the agreement that allows the United States to respond unilaterally to a violation by reimposing U.S. and U.N. sanctions, Iran knows that it faces crippling consequences if it violates the agreement.

If Congress rejects the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran agreement, all of these advantages go away. The risk of an Iranian nuclear breakout and a regional nuclear arms race will increase dramatically. We will be left with no credible, non-military option for stopping Iran's nuclear program.

Now, I certainly respect the views of my colleagues who oppose this agreement, and I have listened carefully to their arguments. Some of them assert that Iran will find a way to cheat and, therefore, no diplomatic resolution is

possible. However, most opponents are careful to avoid talk of military conflict and argue that we can reject this deal, that we can rally the world to impose harsher sanctions, and that Iran will eventually capitulate.

But sadly, that premise is at odds with the facts as they currently exist. Our negotiating partners in this deal—Britain, France, Russia, China, and the European Union—have concluded that this is a fair agreement. In a briefing for Senators last month, the Ambassadors from these nations told us in no uncertain terms that there will be no going back to the bargaining table if Congress rejects this agreement. If the deal is rejected, the most likely outcome is that the international sanctions regime against Iran would unravel. The United States would be isolated, and we would lose credibility as a reliable negotiating partner. So, yes, we would retain the ability to act unilaterally, but unilateral sanctions have their limits, as we have heard in this body. Our military commanders counsel us that even a robust military option would delay, but it would not prevent, Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon because they already have the nuclear know-how.

This agreement is not about becoming friends with Iran or turning a blind eye to its efforts to destabilize the Middle East. In fact, we must redouble our efforts to help our allies counter Iran's malign influence in the region.

In particular, our commitment to the defense of Israel should remain unshakeable. In addition, we must maintain vigorous sanctions against Iran for its support for terrorism and for its violations of human rights.

Now, while there are risks to whatever course we take with respect to Iran, I believe that the choice is clear. Either we recognize that this agreement is the best available option or we chase some fantasy agreement on our own as international sanctions collapse and Iran's nuclear program continues unchecked and our options for stopping it are narrowed.

I am convinced that the agreement negotiated by the United States and our allies is the least risky approach, and it is the approach that is most likely to succeed. As I said last month in New Hampshire, I intend to vote to support this deal.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, as I rise, many who fear the pending Iran vote feel that it could deliver a mortal blow to the Senate's historic support for the safety of the families of Israel.

Have no fear. No matter what, we will always have a capable majority of Americans who support the free and democratic tolerant society of Israel. No matter what the Iranians do, America's commitment will remain to that shining city on Jerusalem's hills, to a nation that has proved that democracy and tolerance can thrive in a place even as hostile as the Middle East and will remain strong.

I represent many people who have survived the Holocaust. Their spirit is within the State of Illinois. They prevailed over the worst evil that has ever disgraced our time. That spirit unites the free and tolerant people of the United States and Israel that we will prevail no matter what.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:28 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015—Continued

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, in anticipation of the majority leader and minority leader coming to the floor in a moment, I will begin the debate, a debate on the most consequential vote I will ever take as an elected official. Certainly, in my 41 years of public service, I have never had a decision to make as serious, as complex, and as meaningful as the decision we will make on the Iran nuclear deal negotiated by the administration and the President.

I rise in opposition to that agreement and to explain why I will vote against it, but before I do, I want to compliment three or four members in particular on the Foreign Relations Committee: former Chairman MENENDEZ from New Jersey, Ranking Member CARDIN from Maryland, and Chairman CORKER from Tennessee. Throughout the entire debate on the Iran nuclear deal, they have been forthright in being sure everybody got every question they wanted answered, that every issue was exposed, and that everybody had the time to participate to the fullest degree possible. Great leadership on the part of Senator CORKER, great leadership on the part of Senator CARDIN, and great assistance on the part of Senator MENENDEZ.

In the end, in committee, I voted for the resolution of disapproval to vote against the nuclear arrangement with the Iranians, and I want to talk about why. First of all, the President said a vote against the deal is a vote for war. I argue with that conclusion. In fact, I think a vote against the deal is a vote of strength. A vote for the deal is an